

Third Sunday of Easter

Throughout the Easter season we read a lot from the Acts of the Apostles and from the Book of the Apocalypse, or the Book of Revelation. These two books help us to reflect upon who we are now as Church and what we will experience when our life here on earth is ended and we are called to share in Christ's glory. Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles takes us to the third time that the apostles had been arrested for proclaiming that Christ had risen. Despite the opposition that they encountered they wanted to share a message of hope and encouragement. "By his own right-hand God has now raised him up to be leader and saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel. We are witnesses to all this, we and the Holy Spirit." As we listen to Peter, we know that we too are called to be witnesses of the Resurrection. We too are called to give others hope and encouragement.

The picture painted in today's reading from the Book of Revelation is one that is meant to give up hope and encouragement when we see all of creation worshipping the Lamb who was sacrificed for our sake. We are invited to join in the hymn they are singing. "To the One who is sitting on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power, for ever and even." For us the full experience of this is still in the future. But the same sacrifice that Jesus offers in heaven is the sacrifice

that He offers for us every time we celebrate the Eucharist.

We listen to God's word to us in the gospel so that we can learn how to be in communion with Jesus, the Lamb slain yet triumphant. Today we read the epilogue to the Gospel of John. As we consistently find in his gospel there are many little things to be discovered in the way that John tells his story, signs if you like, that point to something else. There are seven disciples that go fishing that night. Using the perfect number seven, John might be suggesting that we see the whole church being represented by this little group of seven. That they set out in the darkness by themselves was a formula for failure. Nobody can successfully do the work of the church in the dark without Jesus with them.

It is with the light of morning that they see Jesus on the shore asking them if they have caught any fish. There is a new kind of intimate relationship that Jesus has with them even before they recognise him. He calls them friends and tells them to throw the net to the starboard side. It must have brought back memories of what happened when some of those disciples were first called to follow Jesus. When they again catch a huge number of fish in their nets it is the faith of the beloved disciple that allows him to recognise Jesus on the shore. But it is Peter who jumps into the water. He is moved not so

much by faith but by love. He cannot wait to be with Jesus again. And it his leadership that comes through so clearly in what follows. The other disciples come to the shore after him towing the net and the fish.

Peter is asked by Jesus to bring to him some of the fish that he has caught. That can remind us that Jesus always uses what we have, to do the work that he does through us. Peter draws the net to the shore. It is full of fish; but the net does not break. Peter is the one who holds the church together in unity. We are told that there were 153 fish in the net. One suggestion is that this was the number of fish species known at the time and may be a way of saying that there is room for everyone in the net that is the Church. Jesus feeds the disciples with bread and fish, the food that he used to feed the five thousand. Just as that miraculous feeding was a foretaste of the Eucharistic banquet, so could this breakfast on the lakeside be seen in the same way. Jesus feeds the disciples here as he will continue to feed them and all of us with the Eucharistic food that is himself.

After the meal while they are still gathered around that charcoal fire, Jesus speaks to Peter in a way that both challenges and heals him and makes him ready for mission. It was around another charcoal fire that Peter had three times denied that he knew Jesus. Now he is asked three times if he loves Jesus. Peter does not try to

say that his love for Jesus is greater than any other disciple's love for him. But with deep humility he can say that Jesus knows his love for him. "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." After each of his affirmations of love Peter is commissioned by Jesus to feed his lambs and sheep. Peter is being sent out to continue the work of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Although Jesus makes no mention of Peter's sinful denials, Peter knows that he has been forgiven. He knows too that he is being sent out to be an agent of mercy and forgiveness for others.

What does that say about who we are as Church today? Surely before we do anything else, Jesus is asking us if we love him. It is our love for Jesus that opens our hearts to his Spirit of love. And it is his love for us that empowers us to go out and to act in his name